

## David The Shepherd Who became King Part 2

### Preface

The first volume in this series looking at the life of David ended with David on the run from Saul. This second volume is taken up entirely with the events that took place as a result of Saul's jealousy and malice against David. In it we find David in all manner of difficult situations, some of his own making, but we also see the wonderful hand of God overruling in every circumstance to protect David and to prepare him for leadership in Israel.

I am again grateful to my dear friend and brother in Christ Philip Grist for the help he gave in the recording of this series of Sound Words radio programmes. It is our prayer that the Lord himself will use this volume to teach us all about what it means to be a man after God's own heart.

Derek French  
June 2007

---

### Chapter 1 – David at Adullam and Mizpah: 1 Samuel 22:1-5

We left David in 1 Samuel 21 as he was ejected by Achish the Philistine king from the city of Gath. We noted what a marvellous providence this was because David's life could have easily been ended while he was in the presence of these enemies of Israel. Evidently the gracious hand of the Lord was upon him. But we must not think that because

David was able to leave Gath that his troubles were over. Saul was still after his blood and so David remained on the run from his relentless pursuer.

What we can say about David is that those experiences at Nob and at Gath gave him a renewed appreciation of the Lord's mercy to him. David wrote Psalm 57 at this time and it begins with these lovely words:

*“Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me, for in you my soul takes refuge. I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed. I cry out to God Most High, to God, who fulfils his purpose for me.”* (Psalm 57:1-2)

In the midst of all this turmoil his confidence and trust was firmly focussed on the Lord. Later in the Psalm he tells us how these bitter experiences not only strengthened and directed his faith in the Lord but also led him to worship God.

*“My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast; I will sing and make music. Awake, my soul! Awake, harp and lyre! I will awaken the dawn. I will praise you, O Lord, among the nations; I will sing of you among the peoples. For great is your love, reaching to the heavens; your faithfulness reaches to the skies. Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth.”* (Psalm 57:7-11)

With this in mind we come to David's next destinations.

### 1) David in the Cave of Adullam v1-2

Adullam was a town sited around 16 miles or 26 kilometres south west of Jerusalem, and nearby was a cave large enough to hide David and a considerable number of others. This is where David escaped. Another Psalm David wrote at this period is Psalm 142 which shows us David's awareness of two things. First, the very real danger he was still in as Saul continued to hunt for him and second, David's complete confidence in the Lord whom he describes as his refuge. This second point is quite significant because David did not consider the cave in which he was hiding to be his refuge. For David, it was the Lord himself, and he is the best refuge anywhere.

*"I cry aloud to the Lord; I lift up my voice to the Lord for mercy. I pour out my complaint before him; before him I tell my trouble. When my spirit grows faint within me, it is you who know my way. In the path where I walk men have hidden a snare for me. Look to my right and see; no one is concerned for me. I have no refuge; no one cares for my life. I cry to you, O Lord; I say, 'You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living.' Listen to my cry, for I am in desperate need; rescue me from those who pursue me, for they are too strong for me. Set me free from my prison that I may praise your name. Then the righteous will gather about me because of your goodness to me." (Psalm 142)*

Though aware of his considerable vulnerability and desperation, David's faith rises above it all to the throne of heaven and he commits himself and the whole situation into the Lord's hands. Wonderfully we can do the same when we find ourselves cast down in the depths of life's worries and concerns. The Lord is still the believer's refuge today.

We must also say that although David had been brought to nothing humanly speaking, that did not mean the Lord had finished with him or was unable to help him. It was in a real way the starting point of better things as now the Lord brings others to help him. It is significant to note that his family were the first to come, his parents and his brothers.

*"When his brothers and his father's household heard about it, they went down to him there." (v1)*

You will remember that when Samuel visited David's home his father Jesse had not considered he should have been called in to meet Samuel, his other sons took precedence (1 Samuel 16). You may also recall just prior to when David went to fight Goliath, his oldest brother Eliab was quite angry at him (1 Samuel 17), but now that was all gone. How do we account for this change? First, David had proved himself a faithful servant and worthy warrior, so his leadership qualities were becoming very apparent to his family. Second, Saul had shown himself to be an unworthy king and David's family were no doubt fearful of

his revenge. Third, and most important of all, the Lord brought them to him.

We are then told a further group swelled their numbers so that around 400 men were with him. These additional individuals were quite a mixture.

*“All those who were in distress or in debt or discontented gathered round him, and he became their leader. About four hundred men were with him.” (v2)*

We are not told why these people were in the difficulties described and many have considered them as a rather perverse group of malcontents and possibly a criminal element. The word translated ‘distress’ is a Hebrew term which means to be under pressure and stress. It is probably fair to say that those described as ‘discontented’ were unhappy over the general state of affairs in the kingdom under Saul’s ungodly government. It is a term meaning bitterness of soul, having been wronged or mistreated. However, subsequent events show that they had discipline and integrity under David’s leadership, so even if they were of dubious character when the first arrived they soon changed under David’s influence. They were for the most part brave and heroic men under the command of David for his long period as a fugitive and then as king. They became his mighty men of valour (see 1 Chronicles 12 for details of some of them). We also have to say that this relatively small band of men were the initial building blocks of David’s power base. Indeed it was a growing

band because by the time we reach 2 Samuel 23:13 they have grown to 600 men. They became a faithful band who were committed to both David and the Lord. Clearly David cared for and trained these men in the ways of the Lord. He had previously lived amongst and cared for his father’s sheep, now he was to live among and care for these people. It was all part of God’s training and preparation for kingship.

Interestingly a number of Christian congregations have used the name ‘Cave of Adullam’ for their church meeting places. This, as Gordon Keddie has written,

*“...represents a spiritually discerning grasp of the nature and significance of the cave of Adullam. There was the Lord’s king with the Lord’s remnant – a picture of the church in the wilderness.” (Keddie p 208 Dawn of a Kingdom)*

## **2) David providing for his parents v3-4**

As time passed David’s concern for his aging parents comes to the fore. This is a rather lovely incident because it indicates the unselfish character of David’s heart. He was in great need himself, but he thought of his parents’ safety. He at least was young and fit enough to run and hide from Saul, whereas his parents would not have been up to such constant fleeing. Therefore David does not ignore them nor desert them, but seeks a more permanent place of shelter for them. His love and respect for his parents is very commendable. This shows his appreciation

of the fifth of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:12 where we are commanded to

*“Honour your father and your mother...”*

This is something Paul repeats in Ephesians 6:1-2 which he applies to children who are believers. One cannot help but think of the parallel here with the Lord Jesus himself, who even while in the process of dying on the cross was concerned for Mary, his own mother, which led him to commit her to John’s care.

*“When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing near by, he said to his mother, ‘Dear woman, here is your son,’ and to the disciple, ‘Here is your mother.’ From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.”* (John 19:26-27)

Sadly in many parts of our world aged parents are not cared for or respected, as they should be. Some are completely abandoned by their children. Indeed, whilst visiting another country a few years ago I met an elderly man who had been left on the busy platform of a railway station by his family in a city he did not know. Thankfully some Christian believers were able to take him home and care for him, but how sad his own family had deserted him. Another elderly lady I met while visiting a long stay patient in hospital told me her relatives never visited her. It was as if she had been forgotten. Christian believers have a great responsibility here to follow both the example of David

and the Lord Jesus himself to love, care and support elderly parents and loved ones in the closing years of their lives. This and similar incidents in the Bible show how important the family is in the eyes of God.

We have digressed a little from the details of 2 Samuel 22, so let us return to see what David did for his mother and father. He took his parents to Mizpah in Moab and spoke to its king on their behalf.

*“From there David went to Mizpah in Moab and said to the king of Moab, ‘Would you let my father and mother come and stay with you until I learn what God will do for me?’”* (1 Samuel 22:3)

David’s thoughtfulness is very evident here, as is his desire to be in the will of God. Why he chose Moab is not explained, but there are two reasons which readily come to mind. First, Moab was a natural ally for David because King Saul had gone to war against them which we read in 1 Samuel 14:47. Second, and possibly the main reason, was because David’s own grandmother, Ruth, came from Moab (Ruth 4:13-22) so there was a distant blood link with the country. David’s main purpose was to protect his parents’ life and secure their safety. He evidently obtained a haven for his parents because David left them while he went to “...*the stronghold*”, the precise location of this is not given. Some think it was a mountain or a citadel in Moab or even another cave like at Adullam. It is likely to have been somewhere in Moab because when the prophet Gad

spoke with him it was to tell him to go back to Judah, but precisely where we do not know.

### 3) David submitting to God's word v3 & 5

In v3 David asked the king of Moab to let his parents stay with him:

*"...until I learn what God will do for me..."*

Though David's future was uncertain as far as he was concerned he knew that God knew what would happen to him and so he rested in that and was prepared to patiently wait for God to make his will known to him. When we come to v5 God sent his prophet Gad to speak with David and give him his next instructions. We know little of Gad's background. He could have come from the school of the prophets which Samuel had set up but we are not told. Gad was to become a significant figure in the life of David, as we shall see as this series continues. In 1 Chronicles 21:9 he is called "*David's seer*" – 'seer' being another name for a prophet. In the last year of David's reign in 2 Samuel 24:11ff Gad announced to him the punishment which would fall upon him from God on account of his sin in numbering the people. Then in 1 Chronicles 29:29 we are told he wrote a history of David's life. Here his appearance is of great significance for two reasons.

First, he was God's prophet; a privilege King Saul would no longer benefit from. We are told in 1 Samuel 28:6 Saul

*"...enquired of the Lord, but the Lord did not answer him by dreams or Urim or prophets."*

Saul was on his own, but the Lord was with David.

Second, because he had a message for David, the very thing he was patiently waiting for.

*"But the prophet Gad said to David, 'Do not stay in the stronghold. Go into the land of Judah.' So David left and went to the forest of Hereth." (1 Samuel 22:6)*

The Lord was directing David back to the land where he was to be the next king, and in order that he might learn to trust God completely as his only refuge and fortress. In the rocky stronghold there would be plenty of hiding places, but in a wood he could be attacked from all sides. However, this was where the Lord wanted him to be. The significant thing is that David obeyed immediately and unquestionably. There was no questioning or debating with God over the rightness of such a command. There was no excusing himself or arguing over it. There was complete submission to the revealed will of God. The Lord had said this, and that was sufficient as far as David was concerned. He had to obey. Anyone who is in the path of obedience to God is always in the right place. Again we must stress, David is not out of danger yet, but he is being undeniably assured that the Lord was with him and looking after him. As one Bible commentator has put it, "*He was on the move for God!*"

We of course are in a much more favoured position than David for we have the entire Word of God to guide us. The Bible, the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, are God's lamp to our feet and light to our path (Psalm 119:105). It is through the holy Scriptures that God speaks to us infallibly. It is these God-breathed pages that make a man wise for salvation, and it is these which are useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God is thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:15-17). The great comfort of these verses in 1 Samuel 22 is that when we as God's people find ourselves at our lowest, as David did, the Lord comes with his Word to revive and redirect and re-assure us of his love and tender care. The great issue for us is, are we as obedient to God's Word as David was here?

---

## **Chapter 2 – Saul kills the Lord's priests: 1 Samuel 22:6-23**

We left David in the last chapter returning to the land of Judah and settling in the forest of Hereth. He had moved here at the specific direction of the Lord through his prophet Gad. It would be very tempting to think that since David was obeying the Lord that his life would improve considerably and that Saul would leave him alone. But this would be to make a great mistake. Like the disciples who obediently took a boat across the sea of Galilee at the specific instructions of Jesus in Mark 4:35-41 yet still

faced a furious storm, so David found he remained at the end of Saul's fury. Saul was growing increasingly restless and suspicious of anyone who might in the smallest way have helped or assisted David. He was even more determined to destroy him, and as we shall see in this passage, also destroy those he thought had aided David.

### **1) Saul's unreasonable accusation v6-8**

Saul received word about the movements of David and his men (v6). They had been '*discovered*'. You would have thought that Saul's first reaction was to get a raiding party and go and hunt him down but he did not act like that at all. Instead, he displayed a further deterioration of his mental stability because he began to accuse his own officials. He held court under the tamarisk tree on the hill at Gibeah (v1b). It seems that it was the practice of the early leaders of Israel to hold court under well-known trees: Saul did it previously in 1 Samuel 14:2 and Deborah also in Judges 4:5. There he began to berate his officers, which is hardly the way to gain their support, and his accusations were completely unfounded. First, he started by using bribery to contrast between himself and David.

*“Saul said to them, ‘Listen, men of Benjamin! Will the son of Jesse give all of you fields and vineyards? Will he make all of you commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds?’” (v7)*

Saul was trying to induce tribal loyalty by calling them ‘men of Benjamin’ because David was from the tribe of Judah. Also he was using his supposed generosity to these men to undermine anything David would do for them, and by this his intention was to turn his own men against David. But then in the very next breath he began to accuse them of complicity with David and of deliberately plotting against himself.

*“Is that why you have all conspired against me? No one tells me when my son makes a covenant with the son of Jesse. None of you is concerned about me or tells me that my son has incited my servant to lie in wait for me, as he does today.”* (v8)

He was in effect blaming them for what his own son Jonathan had done and this was totally unreasonable and the sign of an increasingly desperate man. We see here the tragic results of a man from whom the Spirit of the Lord had departed. It is significant that Saul’s officials remained silent. It was a silence that spoke volumes!

## **2) Doeg’s treachery v9-10**

However, Doeg, a man we met before when we considered David’s hasty visit to Ahimelech the priest in Nob (1 Samuel 21:7), did speak up. Significantly he was not an Israelite but an Edomite. In 1 Samuel 21:7 he is described as one of Saul’s servants and his head shepherd. He had seen David, and so he spoke up about it to Saul.

*“But Doeg the Edomite, who was standing with Saul’s officials, said, ‘I saw the son of Jesse come to Ahimelech son of Ahitub at Nob. Ahimelech enquired of the Lord for him; he also gave him provisions and the sword of Goliath the Philistine.’”* (v9-10)

He was in effect acting like a spy, and by implication was blaming the priest of the Lord for siding with David; that is, accusing him of treason, which was a complete lie. Had he been an honest witness then he would have reported how David had lied to Ahimelech. We may well ask why Doeg had not mentioned these details before to Saul, and we can only conclude he was using them here to his own advantage to show that even if the other officials were guilty as Saul accused them, he was not. He was saving his own skin by risking the lives of others; a truly wicked thing to do. It was an act of terrible treachery against the righteous servant of the Lord, Ahimelech. We need to remember that the Lord hates a false witness.

*“The Lord detests lying lips, but he delights in men who are truthful.”* (Proverbs 12:22 - see also Exodus 20:16; 23:1-3)

## **3) Saul accuses Ahimelech v11-15**

Ever ready to blame anyone but himself for the state he was in, Saul grasped hold of Doeg’s words and used them to bolster his fantasies that everyone was against him and siding with David. He did not investigate if Doeg’s words were true and summoned Ahimelech the priest and his

whole family (v11), and they all came. Following a familiar pattern now Saul accused Ahimelech.

*“Saul said, ‘Listen now, son of Ahitub.’ ‘Yes, my lord,’ he answered. Saul said to him, ‘Why have you conspired against me, you and the son of Jesse, giving him bread and a sword and enquiring of God for him, so that he has rebelled against me and lies in wait for me, as he does today?’” (v12-13)*

Again we see Saul’s hasty approach without seeking any genuine proof for his accusations, and also his lies because David was not waiting to attack or kill him. Ahimelech without hesitation defended himself with honesty.

*“Ahimelech answered the king, ‘Who of all your servants is as loyal as David, the king’s son-in-law, captain of your bodyguard and highly respected in your household? Was that day the first time I enquired of God for him? Of course not! Let not the king accuse your servant or any of his father’s family, for your servant knows nothing at all about this whole affair.’” (v14-15)*

Ahimelech’s calm and clear defence was a real mark of his complete innocence of the crime of which Saul was accusing him. Saul at the very least should have investigated this claim further, but failed to do so.

#### **4) Saul’s murderous response v16-19**

Ignoring Ahimelech’s defence, Saul rashly pronounced the death sentence on the Lord’s servant.

*“But the king said, ‘You shall surely die, Ahimelech, you and your father’s whole family.’” (v16)*

The complete injustice of this pronouncement displays the despotic tyrant Saul had become, and in a real way he was acting like some during the days of the Judges who did what was right in their own eyes, instead of doing right in the eyes of God.

Before proceeding, it is important at this point to underline the solemn warning those like Saul bring us. Here was a man who flagrantly disobeyed God, failed to repent, and ignoring God’s Word went far away from the Lord. And Saul had in fact gone too far. So far away from God he would not be able to return. Reader, make sure you do not make the same mistake. Yes, God is gracious and merciful, but he is also holy. He will tolerate ungodliness for a time, giving the guilty ample opportunity to repent and seek his mercy, but for those who persist in their sinfulness and who refuse to come back to him there comes a time when the Lord says ‘No more’, and they are given over to their sinful way without the possibility of repenting. This is very solemn, but there are other examples in Scripture which prove this to be so. For example, there was the Pharaoh in the days of Moses. We read that this man who persistently hardened his heart against the Lord

and his people, found he reached the point where God hardened his heart, and from that there was no return. (See Romans 9:16-17; Exodus 4:21; 7:3; 14:4, 17.) The only secure way to ensure that never happens to you is to repent now before it is too late. If the Lord has been convicting you of your sin, as he did with Saul, then turn to him in repentance and faith today and seek his pardon and mercy before it is too late. Delaying this could result in the Lord turning against you and hardening your heart. Therefore, to use the words of Isaiah 55:6-7,

*“Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.”*

Don't be a Saul!

Having pronounced the death penalty on Ahimelech, Saul then commanded his guards to kill the priests of the Lord (v17) reiterating his false accusation that they had sided with David against Saul. The king's officials, we read, were not willing. They could see the injustice of Saul's plans, and they knew it was a most serious sin to touch the Lord's anointed as each of the priests were (1 Chronicles 16:22). So Saul ordered Doeg to do it (v18). The wicked and treacherous Doeg the Edomite had no such scruples, and he turned and slaughtered 85 priests, their families including children and infants, animals and the town of

Nob. Only one person escaped, Abiathar the son of Ahimelech, and he fled to David. It was a callous blood bath, and Saul and Doeg joined that dreadful company of tyrants in world history who have been guilty of genocide, in this case the mass murder of his own people. How far Saul had fallen, how wicked he had become, what an opponent of the Lord! This is all the fruit of unrestrained sin and there but for the grace of God, go we! If we have become Christian believers then we have much cause to thank God for rescuing us from a similar pathway. Left to ourselves we could well have trodden the same path as Saul.

Abiathar made his way to David and informed him of all that Saul had done. David's reply is instructive:

*“Then David said to Abiathar: ‘That day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, I knew he would be sure to tell Saul. I am responsible for the death of your father's whole family. Stay with me; don't be afraid; the man who is seeking your life is seeking mine also. You will be safe with me.’”* (1 Samuel 22 22-23)

David confessed his own guilt and responsibility in this matter. He had gone to Ahimelech and had lied: his presence there endangered Ahimelech for had Doeg not seen him he would have still been alive.

## **Lesson**

Our sins often cause problems not only for ourselves, but also for others, and this should have a restraining effect on us all.

David assured Abiathar that he would provide for and protect him, so different from Saul. David is clearly the Lord's anointed and a man who even on the run sought to live in a God honouring way.

Such an awful event as the murder of the priests and inhabitants of Nob inevitably raises questions. Why did God allow this to happen? Was the cause of God defeated? Gordon Keddie suggests that there are three strands which indicate even in this terrible violence the purposes of God were evident.

- a. *"This is a fulfilment of the warning to Israel about the excesses of a monarchy that goes wrong. 1 Samuel 8:18 "When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, and the Lord will not answer you in that day." Saul was turning sour. And the Lord had told them so."*
- b. *"The second is a further stage in the fulfilment of the prophecy against the house of Eli," that it would not continue (see 1 Samuel 2:30-36; 3:13-14).*
- c. *The third is that it sealed "for David, his calling before God. He recognised his responsibility for bringing down Saul's wrath on Ahimelech and his family (22:22)." And in assuring Abiathar that he would be safe with David, he was in effect saying*

*there was no way back "David knew, with the deepest assurance of faith, that he must be about the business to which the Lord had called him."*

In promising to protect and preserve Abiathar David shows himself to be the exact opposite of Saul.

---

### **Chapter 3 – David rescues Keilah: 1 Samuel 23:1-6**

Around 5 Kilometres south of Adullam lay the town of Keilah, situated in the rolling hills between the coastal plain and the central highlands. (NB. By Nehemiah's time the area was divided into two districts Nehemiah 3:17f.) Little more is known about the town, but its significance in the life of David was that it was under attack from Israel's persistent enemy the Philistines. David had already had several successful battles with the Philistines and in this section of 1 Samuel 23 he is confronted with yet another occasion for war. The Philistines were a continual thorn in Israel's side, and in a real sense they typify the opposition there has always been to the work of God and his people in the world. Today the Philistines are no more, but the Church of Jesus Christ is none-the-less assailed on a daily basis by those opposed to the Lord and his people. Sometimes it is physical attack and persecution, as at Keilah. Other times it is mental and emotional strain as pressure is put on believers by those not sympathetic to the cause of God. Ultimately behind all such attacks lies the work of Satan who stirs up strife for the Lord's people and constantly puts pressure in one form or another to divert

the people of God from living holy and obedient lives. Again this should not surprise us, for after the devil unsuccessfully attacked Jesus with his temptations in the wilderness and so left Jesus alone, Luke gives this instructive comment.

*“When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him **until an opportune time.**”* (Luke 4:13)

In other words the devil did not give up his attacks on the Saviour. The fact he did not succeed in the wilderness did not convince him he should give up permanently. And so it is for the Christian believer and the Church of Christ today, we will face tribulation. Well let us look in detail now at what happened at Keilah with David.

### **1) David’s first response v1-2 & v6**

To appreciate this incident we need to consider the last verse of the section first.

*“Now Abiathar son of Ahimelech had brought the ephod down with him when he fled to David at Keilah.”* (1 Samuel 23:6)

This ‘*ephod*’ was the breastplate worn by the high priest (see Exodus 28:4-30), which contained what was known as the Urim and Thummim. This was the divinely appointed means whereby the priest could communicate with God and discern the Lord’s will on any matter presented to the Lord. In Exodus 28:15 the purpose of the breastplate is

*“...for making decisions...”* and this is re-emphasised in verse 30.

*“Also put the Urim and the Thummim in the breastpiece, so they may be over Aaron’s heart whenever he enters the presence of the Lord. Thus Aaron will always bear the means of making decisions for the Israelites over his heart before the Lord.”* (Exodus 28:30)

Precisely what these were is not described in Scripture but they have been understood as sacred lots which could be cast to discern the Lord’s will particularly in times of crisis. The Lord commanded Joshua to use this as his appointed way of knowing the will of God.

*“So the Lord said to Moses, ‘Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him. Make him stand before Eleazar the priest and the entire assembly and commission him in their presence. Give him some of your authority so that the whole Israelite community will obey him. He is to stand before Eleazar the priest, who will obtain decisions for him by enquiring of the Urim before the Lord. At his command he and the entire community of the Israelites will go out, and at his command they will come in.’”* (Numbers 27:18-21)

The important thing about the Urim and Thummim is not so much what these items were, but their purpose. They

stood as a constant reminder that Israel were to live their lives in submission to and dependence on the Lord. Their own desires and plans always had to be subordinate to the Lord's will. The one thing that was to characterise the people of Israel from the other nations of the world was their holiness of life: their submission to the Lordship of Almighty God over them. They were to do what he commanded and abstain from what he forbade. Now we need to remember that these were times when only a relatively small part of the Bible existed so they did not have as much in written form as we do. Today we go to Scripture and its specific commands, prohibitions and principles to apply to our lives at times of decision, and every other situation we find ourselves in (2 Timothy 3:16-17). But for ancient Israel the Urim and Thummim were the Lord's temporary provision for guiding his people at times when the Scriptures they possessed did not cover a particular incident or event. The significance of this becomes clear now. David was informed that the Philistines were attacking the town of Keilah. Their intention is revealed as *'looting the threshing floors'* (v1). These were where grain was threshed and stored after time of harvest. So this attack was something that would have long-term effects on the inhabitants of the city, for any who might survive this attack would have no food to sustain them. Interestingly David was told to *'Look'* at this attack indicating he was close enough to actually see it for himself. Evidently whoever told him respected his leadership for they told him and not someone else, and they expected David to do something about it. And what is so

significant is David's immediate response. It was not to panic, nor to run away, nor to order his men to arm themselves for the fight. Instead he brought the whole matter to the Lord.

*"...he enquired of the Lord, saying, 'Shall I go and attack these Philistines?'"* (v2)

It was a simple thing to do, yet at the same time profound. We are given a glimpse here into David's growing spiritual maturity. When he fled to Gath which belonged to the Philistines he made no prayer to see if this was the right thing to do and found himself in great danger as a consequence. But he had learned that lesson well, and so this time he brings the whole matter before the Lord. He wanted to do God's will. He feared disobeying God. He honoured God as the real Lord of his life. And this was something he did publicly because it meant going to Abiathar the priest to use the Urim and Thummim. So at the same time as humbling himself before the Lord and wanting to honour him, he was also giving a tremendous example to his men. Oh that leaders and rulers and kings and presidents would do such a thing today. Sadly so few of them even acknowledge the Lord at all! But we must also ensure we behave in this way ourselves and on a daily basis seek to live our lives in submission to the Lord. If others were to examine our lives today, would they find ample evidence that we are people who live for the honour of the Lord by submitting to his will? Or would they find

things we ought not to be doing because they dishonour the Lord and deny his Lordship over us?

## 2) The fear in David's Men v3

The response of David stands in sharp contrast to his men concerning the news about Keilah.

*“But David's men said to him, ‘Here in Judah we are afraid. How much more, then, if we go to Keilah against the Philistine forces!’” (v3)*

They were filled with anxiety and worry, and we must say these were honest fears. They reasoned that they were already in difficulties in Judah trying to escape from Saul and his army, so to fight against the Philistines as well would be to add to their danger. It is clear that these men had not yet fully appreciated the power of the Lord as David had. This is in a measure understandable as they had not the same experiences of God's grace which David had known. But they did know about the Lord because they were Israelites, and they had seen David enquire of God and receive God's answer through the priest and the Urim and Thummim. But still they were not convinced and terror seemed to grip their hearts. These men are so much like us at times. We know the Lord is great and powerful yet we become fearful of others. The fear of man can have a paralysing effect on our Christian growth and service. Although we no longer use the weapons of physical warfare, we are none-the-less involved in a spiritual war and this means we have to stand against sin

and wickedness and be prepared to speak to others about the unsearchable riches of Christ. We know the Lord Jesus has promised to be with us in this work (Matthew 28:20) yet sometimes we can be overawed by the task and fearful of the opposition of men and so do nothing for the Lord. We must add that this has been a ploy of the devil for centuries to intimidate the Lord's people by stressing their smallness in numbers or frailty in knowledge or the strength of the ungodly etc. Indeed, this has led some to change the gospel they preach to make it easier and more acceptable to their hearers, by diminishing the importance of sin and righteousness and judgement and the cross, by saying that as long as we seek to do our best we will go to heaven, by undermining the importance of the atoning blood of Christ, by denying the importance of doctrines such as the Trinity or the deity of Christ etc. A whole host of things have been done because of the fear of man and unfaithfulness to the Lord. We need to ask the Lord to help us to be like Paul when he wrote to the Thessalonians.

*“We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts.” (1 Thessalonians 2:4)*

For David's men to attack the Philistines at Keilah seemed too much and they were dreading the possibility.

## 3) David's second response v4-5

This panic among his men could have paralysed David as well, but thankfully it did not. With great spiritual wisdom he brought the whole matter to the Lord again.

*“Once again David enquired of the Lord...”* (v4)

There was no greater or better thing he could have done than to present the situation to the Lord. Remember, David did not possess all knowledge, but he knew the Lord did, so he prayed about it. Again the lesson is simple yet also so profound. When we are confronted by fears and worries we should pray about them. We should bring them to the Lord in humble confidence and trust. This is so important because we can so easily not do this and let the panic increase or try to solve the situation ourselves and end up in further difficulty. David unashamedly in humble confidence in God brought the matter to the Lord. And the Lord answered him

*“Go down to Keilah, for I am going to give the Philistines into your hand.”* (v4)

The Lord’s reply was clear and unmistakable, as well as comforting and reassuring. Clear, because David knew God wanted him to fight the Philistines at Keilah. There was no possibility of misunderstanding what God wanted him and his men to do. This was a battle that had to be faced and fought. It was comforting because the Lord assured success in the venture. And we must say how kind the Lord was to David’s men. He could so easily have

rebuked them for not trusting him enough, but like a good Father he reassured them that they had no need to fear for he would deliver the Philistines into their hands. We see again the wonderful grace of God to these men and the tender way he dealt with them. How good to belong to the Lord and to know of his thoughtfulness. He infused courage into their fearful hearts. So David and his men acted with complete obedience and went against the Philistines and accomplished in the Lord’s strength a great victory.

The Philistines were defeated, many losing their lives, their livestock was taken by David, and the people and town of Keilah were rescued. The Lord honoured David and his men as they honoured him. Indeed, this must have been a great encouragement to those men who had been so fearful before. Their faith had received a tremendous uplift from the Lord and would stand them in good stead for the future. It must also have been a great encouragement to David that God did indeed intend him to be king in Israel, because he acted like a king should in protecting his people and the success was from the Lord. Gordon Keddie summarises David’s faithfulness as God’s child in this way:

- i. *He sought the Lord’s will according to God’s commands (23:2)*
- ii. *He was not deflected from his spiritual responsibilities by the fears of others (23:3)*
- iii. *He persevered before God’s throne until he was assured of God’s will (23:4)*

iv. *He obeyed the Lord's will with despatch (23:5)*

These are qualities that should also be seen in us if we claim to be the true followers of Christ. How we need to pray that they will be seen in our lives. We close, again by quoting Gordon Keddie:

*“David might have enquired all day and put off his obedience until a more convenient time. When the Lord Jesus Christ calls, the time is **now!** He has called us to a new direction for our lives. A direction is a way. Jesus is that way, the truth and the life.”*

---



---

#### **Chapter 4 – Saul hunts for David: 1 Samuel 23:7-29**

In Romans 8 among its many precious statements is this one in v31

*“If God is for us, who can be against us?”*

It is a marvellous declaration about which there is no doubt at all that God is the protector and preserver of his people, and no one can oppose the believer and succeed in our destruction. This is a truth that has comforted God's tried and tested people down the centuries, and although it was written by Paul many years after David lived, its truth was something David experienced. And 1 Samuel 23:7-29 is a perfect example of this. The passage begins where we left off in the previous chapter, and David was at Keilah, having just rescued it from the Philistines. It was a

remarkable victory and a real evidence that the Lord was with David. One would have thought the inhabitants of the town would have been ever grateful to David for his help, but as we shall see, if there was any gratitude it was short lived.

#### **1) Saul plans to attack David at Keilah v7-13**

News reached king Saul of David's whereabouts. The precise source of this information is not described but undoubtedly Saul had quite a network of people who supplied him with intelligence. Saul's initial response is quite instructive because he assumed that God was on his side, when we know the Spirit of the Lord had departed from him (1 Samuel 16:14).

*“Saul was told that David had gone to Keilah, and he said, ‘God has handed him over to me, for David has imprisoned himself by entering a town with gates and bars.’” (v7)*

Saul reasoned that David was trapped in this walled town, so he concluded that God himself was supporting his evil schemes. This verse and the later v21, teach us that just because someone uses the name of God or the Lord they are not necessarily true godly people. Saul was bent on murder in his animosity towards David, so he was completely wrong to claim God was in favour of what he was doing. We need to remember Jesus warned us that there would be those on the last day who would claim to

have done all kinds of things in his name, yet who will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

*“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”*  
(Matthew 7:21-23)

Also we need to be careful about the way we interpret circumstances, especially when we think they are favourable to us, as this does not always mean God is encouraging us in our behaviour. We have the example of Jonah who just happened to find a ship going to Tarshish in the opposite direction to where the Lord had told him to go, but we know how wrong he was to run away in disobedience to God. The only way to be sure that God is pleased with us is when we are obedient to the Bible. God is holy and therefore can never condone any form of sinful behaviour. So here Saul was completely wrong in his conclusions, and indeed the progress of events demonstrated that loud and clear, but sadly he failed to heed them.

*“And Saul called up all his forces for battle, to go down to Keilah to besiege David and his men.”* (v8)

He was convinced that he would be able to destroy David, but sadly, though he had used the name of God, he never once considered seeking the Lord’s guidance. We could say that Saul was very much against David, but we must also say that God was for him because God let David know of Saul’s plans in plenty of time to evade them. The Lord was always one step ahead of Saul! And David immediately brought the whole matter to the Lord to seek his will.

*“When David learned that Saul was plotting against him, he said to Abiathar the priest, ‘Bring the ephod.’”*  
(v9)

What a difference existed between Saul and David; Saul was God-less, David was God-centred. David’s prayer to the Lord at this time indicates that he did not fully trust the people of Keilah, even though he had just rescued them from the Philistines and secured their crops.

*“David said, ‘O Lord, God of Israel, your servant has heard definitely that Saul plans to come to Keilah and destroy the town on account of me. Will the citizens of Keilah surrender me to him? Will Saul come down, as your servant has heard? O Lord, God of Israel, tell your servant.’ And the Lord said, ‘He will.’ Again David asked, ‘Will the citizens of Keilah surrender me and my men to Saul?’ And the Lord said, ‘They will.’”*  
(vv10-12)

The Lord warned David that the people of Keilah and Saul would work together against him. How sad this is, particularly when David had been so good to the citizens of the town, but the Lord knew their hearts that they would betray him. We see here the overruling providence of God in that he allowed David to escape before these events took place. The Lord's timing is wonderful. God was for him.

*“So David and his men, about six hundred in number, left Keilah and kept moving from place to place. When Saul was told that David had escaped from Keilah, he did not go there.”* (v13)

The Lord's hand was evidently on David for good, and Saul's plans were completely frustrated. You would have thought that Saul would have at least reconsidered his rash statement earlier that *“God has handed him over to me”*. God clearly had not handed David over to him; otherwise he would not have been able to escape. But Saul was a man devoid of true spiritual life, and was blind to what to us is so obvious and he did not discern that the Lord's hand was against him and with David. Saul is typical of so many today who only use God for their own convenience without ever really trusting him and serving him. I well remember my father saying during a time of war when he was serving in the navy that he discovered ardent atheists were found praying when their ship was under enemy attack, but as soon as the danger was over they soon reverted to their former unbelief and ungodly behaviour. How we all need to search our hearts to ensure we do not fall into the trap Saul had fallen into. It is worth just

pointing out before we go further that David's men had now grown from the 400 in Cave Adullam to 600. Another indication the Lord was strengthening his hand.

## **2) David was kept and encouraged by the Lord v14-18**

### **a. The Lord's direct intervention. v14**

Escaping from Keilah did not mean David was out of danger, humanly speaking, but neither did it mean the Lord ceased to care for him.

*“David stayed in the desert strongholds and in the hills of the Desert of Ziph. Day after day Saul searched for him, but God did not give David into his hands.”* (v14)

David moved into the desert area of Judah where there were mountain heights enabling him to hide, and this was in the region where the town of Ziph was situated. Although Saul kept looking for David, he never found him once, which is quite remarkable considering the size of his army and intelligence network. How do we account for his failure? Because God did not give David into his hands. The Lord was protecting his servant and his men. God was keeping them and however much Saul tried to find them he was no match for the Lord who frustrated all his attempts to capture David. It was abundantly clear that God was for him. And that is a tremendous consolation to Christian believers today. We have a God who is able and does keep his Word. All his promises are true in Christ Jesus. We have noted several times in this series that we also have an enemy who is much stronger than Saul was, the devil. In

Scripture he is described in various ways: he is like a roaring lion who seeks to devour his prey, he is a liar and the father of lies, he is a murderer, he is the accuser, etc. Every description of him is malevolent. Therefore how reassuring to know that the same God who watched over David watches over the Christian believer today. Then consider this promise:

*“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no-one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no-one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand.”*  
(John 10:27-29)

And consider Jude’s marvellous statement at the end of his short letter where he speaks of God as:

*“...him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy...”* (Jude 24)

The believer’s security is absolutely assured that whatever the devil or anyone else may do to us they cannot separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. Even death itself cannot separate us from the Lord (Romans 8:38-39).

### **b. The Lord sends human encouragement v15-18**

We see the thoroughness and tenderness of the Lord in these verses. David again learns that Saul has come to take

his life (v 15). So the Lord sends David human help in the form of his dearest friend, the godly Jonathan. This is so instructive because we all need the fellowship of other believers, especially when we are going through our times of trial and difficulty as David was enduring. And the Lord was aware of this so sent him Jonathan. This is a reminder to us to get alongside any of our brothers and sisters in Christ who are being tried and tested. It should stimulate us to pray for Christians who are imprisoned for their faith and who are often kept in isolation and deprived of Christian fellowship. Thankfully prison bars and gates cannot keep the Lord out.

What is so instructive here is what Jonathan did first of all.

*“And Saul’s son Jonathan went to David at Horesh and helped him to find strength in God.”* (v16)

What a precious friend Jonathan was. He went to David and directed him to the Lord. There are times when we need that kind of help, especially when everything seems to be getting on top of us and the pressure is increasing. We need to look to the Lord and gain our strength from him. There was nothing better or greater that Jonathan could have done for David than this. God is omnipotent, and infinitely wise, and knows all things, and is present everywhere. Wherever David had to run from Saul, God would always be with him and watch over him. Finding his strength in God would give a peace in his heart in the midst of all the turmoil that surrounded him. Jonathan

knew it would be useless to tell David to look to him, for he was but the same frail flesh and blood as David was. We have to say that Jonathan again was the best kind of earthly friend we can ever have, one who helps us to stay centred on God. Then Jonathan encouraged David further.

*“Don’t be afraid,” he said. ‘My father Saul will not lay a hand on you. You shall be king over Israel, and I will be second to you. Even my father Saul knows this.’ The two of them made a covenant before the Lord. Then Jonathan went home, but David remained at Horesh.” (v17-18)*

Jonathan had long accepted God’s will concerning David, and he gladly accepted it too. There was no petty jealousy in his heart over God’s choice instead of him, but willing and happy acceptance that the Lord always does what is good and right and best. His love and respect for David dispelled any feelings of resentment that could have come to him. He even declared that his own father really knew David would be the next king, which makes Saul’s murderous intentions all the more serious and shows just how hard his heart had become. As on previous occasions they made a covenant between themselves. The details are not given but we can safely assume it was a commitment to be loyal to each other. We are then told Jonathan went home, and the sadness about that is that this was the last time these two men were to meet again before Jonathan was killed in battle.

### **3) Saul was relentless in his wicked pursuit of David v19-29**

David discovered the Ziphites, among whom he was living, were as treacherous as the people of Keilah would have been given the opportunity because they informed Saul where David was hiding in the strongholds of Horesh in their region. They went further and offered to do Saul’s dirty work and hand David over to him.

*“Now, O king, come down whenever it pleases you to do so, and we will be responsible for handing him over to the king.” (v20)*

Again Saul used the name of the Lord in a most inappropriate way, breaking the third of the ten commandments.

*“You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.” (Exodus 20:7)*

Saul said, *“The Lord bless you for your concern for me.” (v21)*

And relentless as ever he made plans to pursue David yet again.

*“Go and make further preparation. Find out where David usually goes and who has seen him there. They tell me he is very crafty. Find out about all the hiding-*

*places he uses and come back to me with definite information. Then I will go with you; if he is in the area, I will track him down among all the clans of Judah.” (v22-23)*

The one thing absent from all Saul’s plans and understanding of the situation is any reference to God in prayer for guidance. Although he used the Lord’s name, the truth was that God never entered his thinking in reality at all. He just went and did his own thing. But the Lord was very much in control of the situation, despite Saul’s evil plans, for again David is told of Saul’s intentions.

*“So they set out and went to Ziph ahead of Saul. Now David and his men were in the Desert of Maon, in the Arabah south of Jeshimon. Saul and his men began the search, and when David was told about it, he went down to the rock and stayed in the Desert of Maon. When Saul heard this, he went into the Desert of Maon in pursuit of David.” (v24-25)*

On more than one occasion, David and Saul were separated by only a very short distance.

*“Saul was going along one side of the mountain, and David and his men were on the other side, hurrying to get away from Saul.” (v26)*

That is how close it came, but that mountainside was effectively as much as 100 kilometres as far as God was concerned because he was with David keeping him safe as

he fled from place to place. Then, just as it seemed Saul would finally catch David up, the Lord intervened again, this time using those persistent enemies the Philistines.

*“As Saul and his forces were closing in on David and his men to capture them, a messenger came to Saul, saying, ‘Come quickly! The Philistines are raiding the land.’ Then Saul broke off his pursuit of David and went to meet the Philistines. That is why they call this place Sela Hammahlekoth (which means ‘rock of smoothness’ i.e. of slipping away or escaping). And David went up from there and lived in the strongholds of En Gedi.” (v26-29)*

Again the Lord’s timing was perfect, and Saul was no match for him as God used even the wicked Philistines to divert him. Who would have thought it? So God honoured his promises to his servant David. The plans of the Lord are steadfast and sure, for he works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will (Ephesians 1:11). How often we think fearfully about the future and its possible troubles. This period in David’s life teaches us never to forget that the Lord is on the throne, and he will secure us however difficult our circumstances may prove to be. David wrote Psalm 54 at this time when the Ziphites betrayed him. And his testimony about God is most comforting

*“Surely God is my help; the Lord is the one who sustains me.” (Psalm 54:4)*

The Lord had wonderfully preserved his servant, and very soon he would place Saul directly into his hands.

---

### **Chapter 5 –David is merciful to Saul: 1 Samuel 24:1-22**

The previous chapter of 1 Samuel ended with Saul having to leave pursuing David because the Philistines were attacking the land, and David therefore fled to En Gedi on the shore of the Dead Sea. Saul had spent a considerable time unsuccessfully hunting for David and we would have thought he would at the very least have considered his position and the hand of God in it. Sadly that does not happen and Saul remained true to his wicked heart, but, as we shall see, David responded in a most gracious and remarkable way.

#### **1) Saul Returns To The Hunt v1-2**

News reaches him again of David's whereabouts and he responded according to his usual pattern.

*“After Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, he was told, ‘David is in the Desert of En Gedi.’ So Saul took three thousand chosen men from all Israel and set out to look for David and his men near the Crags of the Wild Goats.” (v v1-2)*

It is hardly possible to read 1 Samuel without recognising Saul's hatred for David. In these verses that is underlined by the fact Saul took three thousand chosen men with him.

These were the equivalent of the special forces of modern day armies. Choice men with particular skills at hunting and destroying the enemy. This meant, of course, that David was hopelessly outnumbered, for he had only 600 men (23:3). What a revelation this gives us of the sad spiritual state of Saul's heart. After all this time he is not changed one little bit. And this stands as a solemn warning to us to ensure we are not like Saul. We see here the principle that Jesus stated so clearly in his Sermon on the Mount where he used the illustration of fruit on a tree to discern the spiritual state of a person.

*“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognise them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognise them.” (Matthew 7:15-20)*

Then Jesus added these chilling words:

*“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 7:21)*

It is the conduct of a man that indicates the spiritual state of his heart, and here Saul's behaviour indicated quite clearly that he was not right with God. Peter puts in a very graphic way as he describes those who were familiar with the good news about Jesus but who did not really turn from their sinful ways and so eventually showed they were far from God:

*"A dog returns to its vomit," and, "A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud."* (2 Peter 2:21)

In both cases, the dog and the sow act according to their nature which has not been changed. The dog remained a dog and the sow a sow. That is exactly how it is with people. Unless there has been a real change of heart then they will eventually display that by sinful conduct, and this is exactly what happened with King Saul. May we heed this warning and ensure we are truly God's children, and if we discover we are not, then we must cry to God to forgive us and give us new hearts. Verse 2 ends with a little bit of geographical information which tells us where Saul went to look for David in an area known as *'the Crags of the Wild Goats'*. This area was a limestone region with many caves ideal for the concealing of large groups of men.

## **2) The Lord delivers Saul into David's hands v3-4**

On his pursuit, Saul came to the sheep pens where there was a cave. We are told in v3 that

*"...Saul went in to relieve himself."*

Saul thought he was completely secure, after all his three thousand men were outside. Little did he know the Lord had delivered him into the hands of the very man he was pursuing. David and his men were hidden at the back of the very cave Saul entered. There he was alone and vulnerable. Again we find the providence of God overruling matters in David's favour, and Saul was no match for the Lord. David's men urge him to seize the opportunity.

*"The men said, 'This is the day the Lord spoke of when he said to you, "I will give your enemy into your hands for you to deal with as you wish."' Then David crept up unnoticed and cut off a corner of Saul's robe."* (v4)

There is no record of this word from the Lord that David's men referred to, and it seems several possibilities are open to us and we shall consider four of these.

- i. It might have been an unrecorded statement from the prophet Gad.
- ii. It may have been the men's own interpretation of Samuel anointing David. 1 Samuel 16
- iii. It could be their assumption from the assurances given to David that he would survive Saul's attacks and eventually become king. 1 Samuel 20:14-15; 23:17

- iv. The phrase translated “*the day the Lord spoke*” can be translated “*today the Lord is speaking*” in which case they interpreted the presence of Saul in the cave as God indicating this.

In many ways it is not essential to know precisely why they said this, because it is clear they considered the Lord had handed Saul over to David and they expected David to make the most of the opportunity, and presumably they would want Saul dead. However, David did not seek his revenge on Saul, but quietly crept up and cut a piece from Saul’s robe but spared his life refusing to heed completely to what his men were suggesting.

### 3) David’s stricken conscience v5-7

The sensitivity of David’s conscience is quite remarkable in the circumstances and reminds us he was a man who only wanted to do God’s will and who was dependant on the Lord for his timing to make him king. We could say he was a man who knew the truth of Romans 13 that the powers that be are ordained of God, even when they are ungodly. Saul was still the anointed king even though the Spirit of the Lord had left him, and the thought that the Lord would be grieved at what he had done filled David with alarm. Such was his own grief that he rebuked his men and the Hebrew term translated ‘*rebuked*’ (v7) literally means ‘*tore apart*’ – a very strong term indeed as they were evidently after Saul’s blood.

*“He said to his men, ‘The Lord forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the Lord’s anointed, or lift my hand against him; for he is the anointed of the Lord.’” (v6)*

We might think David was overreacting here and consider simply taking a piece of Saul’s cloak did not constitute anything sinful, but Saul was still the Lord’s anointed, as David stated. The Bible commentator Dale Ralph Davies suggests that this cutting of the cloth from Saul’s cloak was a symbolic act indicating that David was claiming the kingdom.

*“In 1 Samuel 15:27-28 the tearing of a robe, probably Samuel’s, signified the forfeiture of the kingdom for Saul. Hence David ‘staked his claim to the kingdom that day in the cave when he removed a piece from Saul’s robe.’ David’s act may have been a symbolic declaration of revolt. Only such heavy symbolism explains David’s remorse: ‘David’s heart struck him’ (v5). Even his symbolic action had gone too far.”*

In addition, what this incident shows us is that we need to be very careful how we interpret our circumstances. It seemed that an open door was given to David and he could have so easily made a short cut to the throne by killing Saul, but his decision not to do so was the right one. This open door of opportunity was a real test of his integrity and true dependence on the Lord to bring him to the throne in

God's time, not David's or anyone else's, including his men. Dale Ralph Davies again:

*“For David, however, it was one thing to have the promise of the kingdom (20:13-16; 23:16-17); how the kingdom should come to him was another matter. The Lord's will must be achieved in the Lord's way; the end that God has ordained must be reached by the means that God approves.”*

David truly was a man after God's own heart and it was the Lord's will that governed his life.

### **Lesson**

Not every open door is an indication that the Lord wants us to go through it.

We mentioned Jonah in a previous chapter who found a ship in Joppa about to sail for Tarshish which he must have thought was the very thing he needed. However, he was so wrong as he soon discovered when he had to be thrown overboard in the storm. Biblical principles should always govern our understanding of our circumstances, because favourable conditions do not always indicate the Lord is in them. Perhaps the most outstanding example of this was when the devil tempted Jesus by showing him all the kingdoms of the world and offered to give them to him if he just bowed and worshipped Satan. He was offering Jesus a short cut, an easy way out, avoiding the cross. Indeed, we know and Jesus knew that God had promised

him all the kingdoms of the world (see Psalm 2:8-9). So an open door was presented to Jesus, but he was governed by the will of his Father and refused to yield to Satan's temptation. For God's will must come to pass in God's way, and for Jesus that meant the cross.

The temptations to an easier life or to take a short cut to blessing comes to every believer, and the longing to have life on a higher plane above the pressures of battling with temptation comes to all. But we know the Bible makes it clear that progress in holiness means we must resist the devil and engage in the spiritual battle which can at times be a very hard slog. A.W. Pink suggests:

*“An accurate knowledge of God's Word, a holy state of heart...a broken will, are absolutely essential in order to clearly discern the path of duty in important cases and crisis. The safest plan is to deny all suggestions of revenge, covetousness, ambition and impatience. A heart that is established in true godliness will rather interpret the dispensations of Providence as trials of faith and patience, as occasions to practise self-denial, than as opportunities for self-indulgence” (cf. Psalm 37:5-7; Isaiah 28:16).*

So we need very much to pray for spiritual wisdom and discernment when an open door presents itself to us with favourable conditions to see if we should go through it or turn away. Here David quite rightly turned away and

spared Saul's life. He did what Paul instructed the believers at Rome to do:

*“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”* (Romans 12:21)

#### **4) David demonstrates his innocence to Saul v8-22**

David does something which in a very real way was a dangerous move to make. Remember Saul had this huge army with him and he had been intent on destroying David. Saul left the cave and went his way (v7) when David came out in the open and called to Saul (v8). This was a very courageous thing to do in the circumstances, but David's intention was to show Saul that he was not intent on harming him in any way, but was acting with complete integrity. On hearing David's voice behind him Saul turned to look and David bowed to the ground before him. This was not offering him worship but a mark of true respect for someone of such a high position, and this simple act itself should have made Saul realise David was not out to destroy him. And if David's action had not made its mark, surely the fact David was standing in the entrance of the very cave Saul had just visited must have shaken him into realising David's integrity. Quickly David began to defend himself (v9ff) and his defence is devastating in its exposé of Saul's own corrupt heart.

#### **a. Defence against the accusation he intended to harm Saul v9-15**

First David asked a direct question:

*“Why do you listen when men say, ‘David is bent on harming you’?”* (v9)

It was clear, direct and very challenging, and was clearly designed to gain Saul's attention where it was needed most for he was at that very moment in the process of giving heed to such claims about David. Before Saul had time to give him an answer David came in quickly with the proof of the falsity of the claim others were making about him. He rehearsed how the truth was the exact opposite.

*“This day you have seen with your own eyes how the Lord gave you into my hands in the cave.”* (v10)

This fact alone must have shaken Saul into realising his own actions had not been in submission and obedience to the will of the Lord. Saul had said previously when he hunted for David at Keilah that the Lord had delivered David into his hands (23v7) and this was utterly false and the outcome of the circumstances proved it. But now the tables were turned and in actual fact Saul had been delivered into David's hand by the Lord. David then added,

*“Some urged me to kill you, but I spared you; I said, ‘I will not lift my hand against my master, because he is the Lord's anointed.’”* (v10)

David was declaring that he was totally in submission to the will of the Lord and was depending on him alone. Then if all this had not made its impression on Saul's heart David revealed that he had cut some of Saul's robe off and held it in his hand.

*“See, my father (remember David was married to Saul's daughter), look at this piece of your robe in my hand! I cut off the corner of your robe but did not kill you.” (v11)*

The evidence was there for all to see. And to this David added,

*“Now understand and recognise that I am not guilty of wrongdoing or rebellion. I have not wronged you, but you are hunting me down to take my life.” (v11)*

Saul was being shown for what he really was, a man whose heart was evil, a man without the Spirit of God. Then David adds one further matter which was like a huge hammer used to drive a nail home firmly.

*“May the Lord judge between you and me. And may the Lord avenge the wrongs you have done to me, but my hand will not touch you. As the old saying goes, ‘From evildoers come evil deeds,’ so my hand will not touch you.” (v12-13)*

David was doing two things here. First, he called on the name of the Lord to assess the situation and deal with David accordingly. This is the Lord who sees the intentions of every heart, who knows all things even the secret things men try to hide from others, and who is the Almighty God who can destroy sinners in an instant. David cried to the Lord to judge him concerning the truth of the situation. Saul knew David would not have dared do such a thing lightly or with insincerity, for it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Second, David was declaring that judgement belonged to the Lord and he had no intention of exacting his own justice for the wrong done to him by Saul. In effect David was following what Paul later instructed Christian believers.

*“Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord. On the contrary: ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.’” (Romans 12:19-20)*

What a challenge this is to us in the way we respond to others, especially those who are our enemies. We need to pray for the grace which David displayed here with Saul. David's words must have shaken Saul to the very core of his being, but David was not finished yet.

#### **b. David displayed his own unassuming nature v14-15**

David described himself in the most lowly of terms, namely, like a dead dog and a flea. Here David was showing the huge contrast between himself and his band of men, and Saul's much greater power, army and therefore strength. At the same time David publicly declared his complete dependence on the Lord to defend him and judge him by virtually repeating what he had just said.

*“May the Lord be our judge and decide between us. May he consider my cause and uphold it; may he vindicate me by delivering me from your hand.”* (v15)

No one witnessing this scene could have been left in any doubt as to David's integrity and Saul's lack of it.

### **5) Saul's response v16-22**

Having been presented with this avalanche of evidence against him, Saul rhetorically asks if it really was David and astonishingly we are told he wept aloud (v16). Not only that, but he made a most remarkably true statement.

*‘You are more righteous than I,’ he said. ‘You have treated me well, but I have treated you badly. You have just now told me of the good you did to me; the Lord gave me into your hands, but you did not kill me. When a man finds his enemy, does he let him get away unharmed?’*” (v17-19a)

Saul made a full confession of the amazing kindness of David to him, while he had been the exact opposite in his

treatment of David. He could see clearly that the Lord had indeed delivered him into David's hands, and yet he had spared his life. There was only one conclusion; the accusation that David wanted to destroy Saul was completely false. We are given a very practical example of Proverbs 15:1 which says,

*“A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”*

David's gentleness with Saul had its good effect. Then Saul said,

*“May the Lord reward you well for the way you treated me today. I know that you will surely be king and that the kingdom of Israel will be established in your hands.”* (vv19b-20)

It was quite a remarkable statement from a man who was so far from God as Saul was, and he was compelled to confess that David would be the next king of Israel. A casual reading of Saul's response at this point could easily lead us into thinking that he was at long last in a right attitude of heart, after all he desired God to treat David well. But as we shall see in future chapters that would be to make a grave mistake as Saul was not the least bit repentant, even though he spoke the truth! We need to remember there are two types of sorrow and both may bring those expressing it to tears, as we see here with Saul. There is godly sorrow and worldly sorrow and they are two

entirely different things. Paul describes both of these and their final effects.

*“Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.”* (2 Corinthians 7:10)

Sadly, Saul’s sorrow in 1 Samuel 24 was not godly sorrow at all. Gordon Keddie has written:

*“Saul could not bring himself to true repentance. He had set his face against the Lord. His confession, said Matthew Henry, ‘was sufficient to prove David innocent, even his enemy himself being the judge, but not enough to prove Saul penitent. He should have said, ‘You are righteous and I am wicked,’ but the most he will say is this, ‘You are more righteous than I.’” David’s grace-filled witness brought Saul as near to repentance and saving faith as a sinner can come without actually being converted. But for all the weeping and the recognition of the consequences of his spiritual state and manner of life, Saul was still committed to his own way. He was never evangelized more winsomely than by David on that day, but he held to his eternally suicidal course anyway.”*

It is another warning to us simply not to judge people by their words alone, even when those words are accurate. We must also earnestly look for the fruit of changed behaviour in their lives. It is a sad thing to report but over

the centuries many have professed to have become followers of Christ, but who eventually displayed no change in their lives at all as they returned to their old sinful ways. Jesus himself spoke about this in his parable of the sower:

*“Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.”*  
(Mark 4:16-19)

And again we are challenged to ensure that we do not make the same mistake and use the right spiritual language but not have changed hearts and lives. In a sense we get a clue that all was not well with Saul when we consider how this episode ended for he asked David not to destroy his family.

*“Now swear to me by the Lord that you will not cut off my descendants or wipe out my name from my father’s family.”* (v21)

It was almost as if he still did not accept that David’s behaviour would be maintained. If Saul’s own words had been sincere then he would not have needed to ask David to do this. David, however, as gracious as ever, promised on oath he would not destroy Saul’s family (v22). Then

Saul went home and David returned to the stronghold which seems to indicate he did not really trust what Saul had said as an indication Saul had truly repented of his wicked ways.

### **Conclusion**

It would be all too easy to end this chapter on the pessimistic note we have just made, but that would be to miss the really positive lessons this passage presents to us.

### **Lesson 1**

The one thing that stands out most clearly about David is that he really was a man after God's own heart. Throughout this whole incident he is seen as a man who wanted above all else to honour the Lord, and this is why he was content to entrust his future to the Lord and his timing. His immediate regret at having simply cut a piece of cloth from Saul's robe teaches us he was a man who wanted above all things to obey God and honour God with his life. Holiness of life was a priority for David and it is to be so for us as well. We may never find ourselves in the circumstances David faced, but whatever we face in our lives we should at all times seek to live in a manner that truly pleases and honours God.

### **Lesson 2**

It is also clear that those whom God wants to bless will be blessed in the end regardless of the opposition of men or even Satan himself. The wonderful providence of God seen in the events of this chapter show us that God is

absolutely sovereign over the affairs of the whole universe and over men in particular, including wicked men. Saul, even with his army of 3000 men, was no match for the Lord who so easily delivered him into the hands of David in that cave. And even Saul himself was compelled to confess that he knew David would most certainly be the next king of Israel. The comfort of this for the believer is immense, because it means all that God has promised us in his Word will become true. We know from Hebrews 2:10 that the Lord has declared he will bring "*many sons to glory*", and those many sons refer to every true follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. Indeed, this is what Jesus prayed for in his high priestly prayer just before his crucifixion.

*"Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world."* (John 17:24)

Further, the Holy Spirit has been given to each Christian believer as the guarantee that we will inherit the glory of heaven

*"Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession; to the praise of his glory."* (Ephesians 2:13-14)

No one and no thing will prevent God bringing the Christian believer to the glory and blessedness and joy of heaven itself, to be with Christ and to be with him forever. What a wonderful thing it is to belong to God, which is true for all who follow his dear Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Reader, do you?

---

## **Chapter 6 –David, Nabal and Abigail: 1 Samuel 25v1-44**

As we commence a new chapter in the record of David's life it is significant to note the first verse of 1 Samuel 25 is not about David, but about Samuel. It records the death of this faithful servant of the Lord who was the last of the judges in Israel and also a prophet. It is fitting then that we discover he was mourned deeply by the people who had benefited so much from his ministry among them.

*“Now Samuel died, and all Israel assembled and mourned for him; and they buried him at his home in Ramah.” (1 Samuel 25:1)*

This verse is also a timely reminder to us all that unless the Lord Jesus returns we will all have to die (Hebrews 9:27). The question is, are we as ready to meet God as Samuel was? It is faith in Christ which prepares us for that great event in our lives, and faith in Christ alone as Jesus himself declared in John 14:6

*“Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me.’”*

The remainder of the chapter is taken up with two new individuals that come into David's life, namely a man called Nabal and his wife Abigail.

### **1) The description of Nabal and Abigail v1-3**

The remainder of verse 1 tells us that David moved to the desert of Maon which is in the southern part of the land to the west of the Dead Sea. The mention of Maon leads us to the details about this man Nabal and his wife Abigail who lived in the area at Carmel. Nabal was a very wealthy man because we are told in v2 that he had a thousand goats and three thousand sheep, which even today is a considerable number. The time of this incident is simply described as sheep shearing time (v2).

We are then given a cameo about Nabal and his wife. Abigail is introduced to us first of all as both an intelligent as well as beautiful woman. The Hebrew words translated intelligent mean an excellent understanding, a person who was prudent and wise and had a good insight into matters. This applies not only to things of a natural and domestic realm but also spiritually. She was a godly woman, which again we shall see in her dealings with David. Her name means “my father's joy” and tells us a little of the delight she brought to her family. The words of Proverbs 31:10 would be an excellent description of this dear lady.

*“A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies...”*

By sharp contrast Nabal is described in very unflattering terms.

*“...but her husband, a Calebite, was surly and mean in his dealings.”* (v3)

As a Calebite he came from the family of the godly Caleb who was commended in the days of Moses and was one of the spies who brought back a good report about the land of Canaan. But sadly Nabal did not have the same godly characteristics, and that is an important reminder that true godly spiritual life is not something we inherit from our parents or forebears. We are saved by grace and that is seen when an individual repents of their sin and places their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Although Nabal had this godly ancestor he was far from that himself. Indeed the name Nabal literally means ‘fool’ as v25 makes clear. This is such an unusual name to be given that some have suggested it might have been his nickname given on account of his character. Whether this is so or not we cannot determine, but the passage indicates to us that he was a fool in the biblical sense of that term – spiritually, morally and socially foolish.

*“For the fool speaks folly, his mind is busy with evil: He practises ungodliness and spreads error*

*concerning the Lord; the hungry he leaves empty and from the thirsty he withholds water.”* (Isaiah 32:6)

And we shall see Isaiah’s description an amazingly accurate description of Nabal. Added to this we are told he was surly or churlish as well as mean or evil in his dealings with others. So he was not only bad in his heart but also in his behaviour. The one follows the other. The old commentator John Gill wrote:

*“Further he was morose and ill natured in the temper and disposition of his mind, and wicked in his conversation, and fraudulent and oppressive in his dealings with men.”*

Dale Ralph Davies put it simply: *“Nabal was hard and nasty...”*

## **2) His disrespect of David and his men. v4-11**

We are told that David and his men had acted most honourably towards Nabal and his shepherds for when they were out grazing in the area where David was, David and his men protected them. Banditry and rustling were a common part of life in those days and many a farmer lost both animals and men to ruthless attackers. Later in v 16 the testimony of one of Nabal’s servants said they were like a wall around them giving their protection. With this background we read that David sent ten of his men to visit Nabal to seek his help by way of a gift of food. This was certainly not an unreasonable request because they had

been such a help to Nabal's men, and it was not a demand either, but simply a request. Indeed David carefully instructed his men to approach Nabal with respect.

*“Say to him: ‘Long life to you! Good health to you and your household! And good health to all that is yours!’”*  
(v6)

Then he instructed them to ask for Nabal's help.

*“Now I hear that it is sheep-shearing time. When your shepherds were with us, we did not ill-treat them, and the whole time they were at Carmel nothing of theirs was missing. Ask your own servants and they will tell you. Therefore be favourable towards my young men, since we come at a festive time. Please give your servants and your son David whatever you can find for them.”* (v7-8)

We would expect that Nabal would have been most grateful for the way David had treated his own men and animals, but in actual fact he was quite the opposite! David's men arrived, gave Nabal his message and then patiently waited for his response (v9). What they received was certainly not what they expected.

*“Nabal answered David's servants, ‘Who is this David? Who is this son of Jesse? Many servants are breaking away from their masters these days. Why should I take my bread and water, and the meat I have*

*slaughtered for my shearers, and give it to men coming from who knows where?’”* (v10-11)

This was a case of surly ingratitude as well as being untruthful. He acted as if David were some unknown individual when he was well known throughout the nation by this time, and he refused to offer David any help at all. Also sheep shearing was a time of festivity and generosity and Nabal had an abundance of provisions that he could have easily given a little to David and his men. But he responded with total selfishness. If David's men had not acted as they did Nabal would almost certainly have had less sheep than he owned and may have even lost a very large number of them by marauding bandits. But all Nabal thinks about is himself and his possessions, much like the rich fool and his barns in the parable Jesus told in Luke 12:13-21.

### **3) David's initial response to Nabal v12-13**

*“David's men turned round and went back. When they arrived, they reported every word. David said to his men, ‘Put on your swords!’ So they put on their swords, and David put on his. About four hundred men went up with David, while two hundred stayed with the supplies.”* (v12-13)

Perhaps uncharacteristically in the light of the way David treated King Saul, he quickly moved to take revenge on Nabal. It was a marked difference from his previous behaviour and we must say totally inconsistent. In Chapter

24 when he had opportunity to kill Saul he refused to do so because he was prepared to wait for God to act in his time, but here he does the opposite and wants to take things into his own hands. Hurt pride is a most dangerous thing. David acted impulsively and we must add without recourse to the Lord over the matter. In addition, it is clear that David intended to kill Nabal as in v13 reference to swords are referred to no less than three times.

*“David said to his men, ‘Put on your swords!’ So they put on their swords, and David put on his. About four hundred men went up with David, while two hundred stayed with the supplies.”*

And this is spelled out even clearer in v22.

*“May God deal with David, be it ever so severely, if by morning I leave alive one male of all who belong to him!”*

As unpleasant as Nabal had been he had not committed a capital offence so David was clearly in the wrong here, and that is something he admits later in the chapter (v33-34 & v39). There is another important lesson here and it is that even the most godly of men and heroes of the faith are still but men at their best, and they all have flaws, including ourselves. It is a timely reminder that our trust must not be in men, even in men who are most helpful as David was, but in the Lord. He alone is perfect and he alone is worthy of our complete trust.

#### **4) Abigail’s Intervention v14-35**

The major part remaining in the chapter concentrates on the timely and gracious intervention of Nabal’s wife, Abigail. But interestingly it all started with the word of an unnamed servant of Nabal (v14). He went to Abigail to explain what David had done and how Nabal only insulted him. He added details showing both David and his men had acted with the utmost kindness and integrity doing them good and protecting them like a wall around them. He urged Abigail to think carefully about this situation.

*“Now think it over and see what you can do, because disaster is hanging over our master and his whole household. He is such a wicked man that no-one can talk to him.” (v17)*

His assessment of Nabal as a wicked man who will not listen to sound advice adds more to the picture of his folly. Abigail acted decisively and quickly prepared a large amount of food to take to David.

*“Abigail lost no time. She took two hundred loaves of bread, two skins of wine, five dressed sheep, five seahs (about 37 litres) of roasted grain, a hundred cakes of raisins and two hundred cakes of pressed figs, and loaded them on donkeys.” (v18)*

But she was careful not to tell Nabal. As she approached David we are told that he had just said how ungrateful

Nabal had become and that he would not let a single male of all who belonged to him alive by the next morning. So the timing of Abigail's arrival is so significant. The Lord in his overruling providence sent her at just the right time. It is very instructive to see the way she responded when she met David (v20-31).

- i. She acted with great deference to David (v23 – 24a) falling at his feet in respect and humility.
- ii. She asked David to blame her for what had happened, even though she was not to blame at all (v24).
- iii. She pleaded with David to allow her to speak (v24).
- iv. She urged him to take no notice of her wicked husband, the man whose name meant 'fool' (v25).
- v. She pleaded her ignorance of the servants David had sent (v25), and by implication asked him to be lenient with her.
- vi. She then put her intervention down to the Lord and the Lord alone (v26).

*“Now since the Lord has kept you, my master, from bloodshed and from avenging yourself with your own hands, as surely as the Lord lives and as you live, may your enemies and all who intend to harm my master be like Nabal.”* (v26)

David had made no reference to the Lord for his actions so this must have struck his conscience.

- i. She urged David to accept the gift of food she brought for him and his men (v27).
- ii. She again pleaded for forgiveness for Nabal's offence and assured David she knew the Lord would make him king and give him a lasting dynasty (v28), adding, “Let no wrongdoing be found in you as long as you live.”
- iii. She directed David again to the Lord in v29.

*“Even though someone is pursuing you to take your life, the life of my master will be bound securely in the bundle of the living by the Lord your God. But the lives of your enemies he will hurl away as from the pocket of a sling.”*

She assured David that if he listened to her it would save him from serious grief when he became king which she assured him he would become.

*“When the Lord has done for my master every good thing he promised concerning him and has appointed him leader over Israel, my master will not have on his conscience the staggering burden of needless bloodshed or of having avenged himself. And when the Lord has brought my master success, remember your servant.”* (v30-31)

Gordon Keddie comments:

*“...to destroy Nabal’s household would have destroyed his peace of mind and his personal integrity. His standing as the Lord’s king would not have been enhanced by such action. Indeed, he would have shown himself to be little different from Saul. He would only have been sacrificing his subjects on the altar of unhallowed pride.”*

Sin in our lives must be resisted always. Abigail was introduced to us in v3 as a woman of “...*intelligence and beauty...*” This was most certainly true of her as this episode indicates. She acted in a most godly and gracious and wise way, to prevent David from serious sin and also to protect the men in Nabal’s household. We must add that her action showed she possessed great courage, and her speed of response showed she was a most discerning woman. But we must remember her own words that it was not the servant, nor her who was helping David do the right, but the Lord himself. There was no more powerful way she could have helped David than to tell him what the Lord’s will was.

### **5) David’s response v32-35**

He was filled with gratitude to the Lord and to her for her decisive action. He discerned the Lord’s hand in all that had taken place, the timing of her arrival and the words she spoke. He knew that what she had spoken was correct and he had acted in haste and inconsistency and wrongly.

*“David said to Abigail, ‘Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, who has sent you today to meet me. May you be blessed for your good judgment and for keeping me from bloodshed this day and from avenging myself with my own hands. Otherwise, as surely as the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, who has kept me from harming you, if you had not come quickly to meet me, not one male belonging to Nabal would have been left alive by daybreak.’” (v32-34)*

The Lord had rescued David from his sinful course. And we see here another mark of David’s greatness, in that he was man enough to admit when he had done wrong and to submit to the Lord and to do so publicly before others. It is not easy to admit you are in the wrong and we all tend to resist that when our folly is exposed, but David teaches us the need for humility and honesty when we have made mistakes and erred. How we need the Lord’s grace very much indeed because our pride can be our greatest stumbling block and all too easily stubbornly refuse to admit when we have done wrong. However, it is the path of repentance we are required by the Lord to walk, and if done speedily will restore our fellowship with God quickly. (See Psalm 66:18 *“If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened...”*) And we see just how different David was from Saul. David was quick to admit his error and the Lord’s mercy which stopped him being guilty of murder, whereas Saul refused to repent even when his sin had been exposed. David then sent Abigail home in peace and assured her he would do as she requested.

### 6) Nabal's response v36-39

On Abigail's return home she found Nabal feasting and drunk, so said nothing until the next morning when he was sober. She informed him of all that had taken place and the great danger his foolishness had brought not only on him but all the men in his household, and how she had interceded with David. Immediately his heart failed him and became like stone. Some think he may have fallen into a coma. Ten days later the Lord struck him and Nabal died. David had no need to intervene for the Lord was his keeper, and he was quick to acknowledge the Lord's merciful intervention.

*“When David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, ‘Praise be to the Lord, who has upheld my cause against Nabal for treating me with contempt. He has kept his servant from doing wrong and has brought Nabal’s wrongdoing down on his own head.’” (v39)*

The Lord himself had kept him from doing wrongdoing and had intervened on his behalf for Nabal's wickedness.

The passage closes by telling us in v39-44 that David then took Abigail into his care and she became his wife along with a woman named Ahinoam of Jezreel, while his wife Michal, Saul's daughter, Saul gave to another man, Paltiel. (NB.Polygamy was the practice of the day but was not in accord with a correct understanding of the Word of God. We can only say the Lord in his grace overruled and that

this is not an excuse for any Christian to be involved in a polygamous relationship with more than one wife.) With the lesson learned the scene is set for David to spare Saul's life yet again, as we shall see next.

---

### Chapter 7–David enters Saul's camp: 1 Samuel 26:1-25

We have a saying that ‘history repeats itself’ and in real sense that is true with the next episode in David's life. But it was more than mere repetition for it was also a test to see if David had truly learned the lessons of the previous chapter and that he was always to leave his future in the Lord's hands and to let the Lord avenge his enemies. You will recall that he had rashly wanted to take revenge against Nabal, but the Lord intervened through Nabal's wife Abigail and David confessed he had been wrong. Well, the Lord presents to David another situation with King Saul, and the issue was ‘Would David trust the Lord to work things out with his enemy or would he act rashly again?’

#### 1) Saul and the treacherous Ziphites v1-4

The opening verse of chapter 26 makes mention again of the Ziphites and their opposition to David.

*“The Ziphites went to Saul at Gibeah and said, ‘Is not David hiding on the hill of Hakilah, which faces Jeshimon?’” (v1)*

You may recall that we met the Ziphites previously in 1 Samuel 23:19 where they did the same thing as here and informed Saul of David's whereabouts. Their motives are uncertain, but clearly they wanted to gain favour with Saul at David's cost. It is also evident that they had excluded the Lord from their thinking just as Saul himself had done, because their previous attempts to help Saul capture David had been frustrated by him. They are a sad reminder that some people never learn from the Lord and persist in their sinful and selfish ways without any regard to the children of God they oppose. Saul was at his home base in Gibeah and on hearing this news he immediately set off with his band of 3,000 chosen men to search for David again. This confirms what we mentioned in a previous chapter that Saul's confession of his wrongful pursuit of David in 1 Samuel 24:16-21 was not accompanied by genuine repentance. He had expressed remorse, but remorse falls short of repentance. For example, many a thief is sorry when he is caught by the police and imprisoned for his crime, but upon release he returns to stealing again. His remorse was not repentance.

Repentance means a change of mind towards sinful behaviour which both admits the sin and hates it resulting in turning from it, forsaking that wrong way of living. Saul is doing exactly the same thing he had done previously and returned to hunt for David. Even though Saul used the name of the Lord in his previous encounter with David in Chapter 24, there was no real commitment to the Lord at all otherwise he would have repented and not hunted for

David yet again. We are challenged again here to examine our own hearts to see if we are genuine in our commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ. Have we truly repented of our sin, or are we simply using Christian language without Christian reality? The need to be honest and genuine is vital. The need to be thoroughly repentant is essential. The need to be submissive to God's will and not our old sinful way is crucial. We need to remember the words of James:

*“In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead...As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.”*  
(James 2:17 & 26)

Sadly for Saul there was no real change in his heart, and this becomes clear by his conduct. Saul responded to the Ziphites intelligence rapidly and set out to the region of Hakilah to find David. His intention is again clear: he wanted to kill David. Again Saul left God completely out of his thinking because no one can go against God and succeed. When Saul and his men camped by the road on the hill of Hakilah, David was in the desert (v2-3). The Lord was keeping a safe distance between David and Saul. Also, David received news of Saul's pursuit. We are not told how but again we see the providence of God working for his servant. On receiving the news David wisely sent out scouts to see if Saul had definitely arrived (v4).

## **2) David and his treatment of Saul v5-12**

David set out to see where Saul was and he found him camped with his army surrounding him and Abner, the commander sleeping by his side. There appears to have been no one on guard, or if there was they were asleep leaving Saul very vulnerable to attack (v5). David asked two of his men, Ahimelech and Abishai which of them would accompany him into Saul's camp, to which Abishai agreed (v6). We are given a little bit of biographical detail about these men. We are told that Ahimelech was a Hittite while Abishai the son of Zeruiah was the brother of Joab who would become the long serving commander of Israel's army. According to 1 Chronicles 2:16 Zeruiah was David's older sister making Abishai and Joab his nephews. The two men came right into the camp undetected and found Saul and his men fast asleep and Saul's spear stuck in the ground near his head (v7). Immediately Abishai interpreted the circumstances as David's men had done previously when Saul came into the same cave they were hiding in, namely this is an opportunity to kill their enemy.

*“Abishai said to David, ‘Today God has given your enemy into your hands. Now let me pin him to the ground with one thrust of my spear; I won't strike him twice.’”* (v8)

So again David was being put under test. Would he take things into his own hands, or would he leave Saul for God to deal with? Not only that, Abishai was willing to do the dirty work for David. It would have been all too easy for David to give in to this huge temptation. Everything seemed right; he had the opportunity and someone to do

the job for him. What would he do? Had he learned the lesson with Nabal? Was he really going to trust the Lord? Without any hesitation David revealed that he had learned from his previous mistake and he was trusting God and God alone to work out his future.

*“But David said to Abishai, ‘Don't destroy him! Who can lay a hand on the Lord's anointed and be guiltless? As surely as the Lord lives,’ he said, ‘the Lord himself will strike him; either his time will come and he will die, or he will go into battle and perish. But the Lord forbid that I should lay a hand on the Lord's anointed.’”* (v9-11)

David had indeed learned the lesson and he was not going to disobey the Lord. Further, he knew he could leave Saul with God to deal with and remove in his own way, either by him dying naturally or by being killed in battle, which we know eventually did happen. The Lord had done this with Nabal and could easily do so with Saul. David was not going to take that responsibility but he would trust the Lord who could do with Saul whatever he wanted. He was governed by Biblical principle and not by opportunism. David also knew that God did not want him to remove Saul so he submitted and obeyed the Lord because Saul was still the anointed of God. We are reminded that we have a God given responsibility to the civil leaders God has given us.

*“Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honour the king.”*  
(1 Peter 2:17)

*“I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.”* (1 Timothy 2:1ff)

So David acted honourably and did not take advantage of Saul and kill him. Instead, David told Abishai,

*“Now get the spear and water jug that are near his head, and let’s go.”* (v11)

This they did (v12) and even though they were in the centre of the camp with these 3000 soldiers around them not one of them awoke and we are told a very specific reason why.

*“So David took the spear and water jug near Saul’s head, and they left. No one saw or knew about it, nor did anyone wake up. **They were all sleeping, because the Lord had put them into a deep sleep.**”* (v12)

Again we are told of the Lord’s hand being on David for good, protecting him in this rather special way and this was

why his enemies were so helpless. It is an illustration of the New Testament’s teaching in Romans 8:31

*“If God is for us, who can be against us?”*

Saul and his soldiers were useless against the Lord who always works things out “...in conformity with the purpose of his will.” (Ephesians 1:11) Anyone who thinks they can resist and oppose God has made a very serious mistake. That applies to those who would even go so far as to deny his existence at all. They will all fail and will all be called to account by God, but then it will be too late for them to repent. Over the centuries there have been individuals and governments who have been determined to wipe out the Christian Church, and some are attempting to do that even today, but they have and will all fail. No one can resist God and get away with it, and to think otherwise is to make a serious mistake. We need to remember that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

### **3) David speaks up v13-20**

Again acting wisely David climbed the hill opposite Saul so that there was quite a distance between them, and then David courageously began to call out and goad Saul’s men.

*“He called out to the army and to Abner son of Ner, ‘Aren’t you going to answer me, Abner?’ Abner replied, ‘Who are you who calls to the king?’ David said, ‘You’re a man, aren’t you? And who is like you in*

*Israel? Why didn't you guard your lord the king? Someone came to destroy your lord the king. What you have done is not good. As surely as the Lord lives, you and your men deserve to die, because you did not guard your master, the Lord's anointed. Look around you. Where are the king's spear and water jug that were near his head?'"* (v14-16)

Clearly Abner and his fellow soldiers had failed in their responsibility to protect the king who was the Lord's anointed, and David embarrasses them by his accusation. Yet at the same time he was proving the validity of his own word previously in 1 Samuel 24 that he was not in rebellion against the king and had no intention of taking his life. In fact, David was one of the most faithful defenders of Saul's life because he spared him when he could so easily have been killed. Saul recognised David's voice straight away and called to him

*"Is that your voice, David my son?"* (v17)

Quickly David responded demonstrating firmly that he had not acted in any wicked way against Saul. Indeed his words were in the strongest terms for he said that if he had acted wrongly and it was God who had told Saul to kill David then he would make the offering necessary to atone for that.

*"David replied, 'Yes it is, my lord the king.' And he added, 'Why is my lord pursuing his servant? What*

*have I done, and what wrong am I guilty of? Now let my lord the king listen to his servant's words. If the Lord has incited you against me, then may he accept an offering."* (v17-19)

To this quickly David adds the possibility that it was other men who incited Saul to seek and destroy him then the king needs to take that into account carefully.

*"If, however, men have done it, may they be cursed before the Lord! They have now driven me from my share in the Lord's inheritance and have said, 'Go, serve other gods.' Now do not let my blood fall to the ground far from the presence of the Lord. The king of Israel has come out to look for a flea as one hunts a partridge in the mountains."* (v19-20)

David exposes his opponents for what they were, and by implication Saul as well. David had acted with complete integrity and there was no reason to exclude him from fellowship with the Lord and his people. Then to show Saul how absurd his fanatical pursuit of David had been he likened himself to a flea and a partridge. The one thing David feared was that he would be deprived of the public worship of the Lord if he was driven out from his share in the Lord's inheritance, which he knew was essential. Hebrews 10 makes this same point to Christian believers, some of whom were saying they had no need to meet with other believers for worship and teaching and fellowship (See Hebrews 10:19-25).

#### 4) The outcome v21-25

Again David's words seem to have cut right into Saul's conscience. Saul confessed that his conduct had been wrong.

*“Then Saul said, ‘I have sinned. Come back, David my son. Because you considered my life precious today, I will not try to harm you again. Surely I have acted like a fool and have erred greatly.’” (v21)*

He admitted he has been both unwise and ungodly in the way he behaved towards David, and promised not to try and do him any more wrong. It was an honest confession, but it is an open question whether even at this point Saul had truly repented. We say this because his behaviour in other matters still did not show that stamp of authenticity about it. For example, such as his visit to the medium known as the witch of Endor in 1 Samuel 28 which God had forbidden in his law – (see Leviticus 19:31; 20:6, 27; Deuteronomy 18:11). One thinks of another Biblical leader who admitted he had sinned but who never repented, namely the Pharaoh at the time of Moses and the Exodus who admitted his sin twice!

*“Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron. ‘This time I have sinned,’ he said to them. ‘The Lord is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong.’” (Exodus 9:27)*

*“ Pharaoh quickly summoned Moses and Aaron and said, ‘I have sinned against the Lord your God and against you.’” (Exodus 10:16)*

These are solemn records in Scripture that perhaps helps us to understand why Peter wrote in his second letter:

*“Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure.” (2 Peter 1:10)*

Careful self examination is essential to ensure we really are following the Lord and that his grace has truly been at work in our lives. Sadly Saul did not seek the grace and mercy of God nor seek his forgiveness, but rested in his own abilities. David then returned Saul's spear but he again kept his distance and asked Saul to send one his young men to fetch it. David knew all too well the treachery of Saul's heart and he evidently was not convinced of Saul's sincerity and with good reason, so he did not put himself into the place of temptation and danger. Then David confidently declared he was trusting in the Lord for his future because he knows he will do what is right, always.

*“The Lord rewards every man for his righteousness and faithfulness. The Lord gave you into my hands today, but I would not lay a hand on the Lord's anointed. As surely as I valued your life today, so may the Lord value my life and deliver me from all trouble.” (v23-24)*

Saul responded with words that show us he realised the Lord was indeed with David.

*“Then Saul said to David, ‘May you be blessed, my son David; you will do great things and surely triumph.’ So David went on his way, and Saul returned home.”*  
(v25)

And these were words that became wonderfully true for David as we shall see in the next volume in this series, however there was no attempt by Saul to be reconciled to David, he just went home. They departed and were never to see each other again. The opening verse of the next chapter indicates quite clearly that David could not trust Saul at all.

---

---

**This book is supplied by Grace Baptist Mission and other titles are available in e-mail format at the address below:**

**Grace Baptist Mission  
12 Abbey Close  
Abingdon  
OXON  
OX14 3JD  
UK**

**e-mail: [radio@gbm.org.uk](mailto:radio@gbm.org.uk)**